

cuts simply known as Operation Offset. It contained many good ideas, and it seems to have engendered, Mr. Speaker, an important debate here in Washington, DC, and all around the country.

It seems that Members of Congress know and the American people know that raising taxes or raising the national debt is no way for this national government to respond to the extraordinary costs of Katrina. We must ensure that a catastrophe of nature does not become a catastrophe of debt for our children and grandchildren through introducing tough budget cuts like Operation Offset.

□ 1030

#### CALLING FOR EXTENSION OF MILC PROGRAM

(Mr. OBEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, last year in the conference on the disaster supplemental, Senate conferees passed a provision extending the MILC program for 2 years, and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHERWOOD) and I had lined up enough votes on the House side to accept that amendment. To prevent that from happening, the Republican chairman of the conference gavled the meeting to a close, and we never met again on the subject. Despite the fact that the President had said in my hometown on that same day that he favored the extension of the MILC program, when my office called the White House asking him to intervene in order to get that conference reopened so that the MILC program could be extended, the White House declined.

That program is now scheduled to expire at the end of this week. If that happens, we will have lost an important safety net for Wisconsin's family dairy farmers. I urge the House agriculture authorizing committee to immediately report out to this floor an action extending the MILC program so that we do not lose that vital program, and I urge the Republican leadership of the House to see to it that the committee does just that.

#### CALLING FOR INDEPENDENT COMMISSION REGARDING HURRICANE KATRINA

(Ms. BERKLEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. BERKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I watched the testimony of former FEMA Director Michael Brown yesterday. By any measure, it was a shameful and disgraceful performance. More disgraceful is the revelation that after being appointed to a position for which he was completely unqualified, after doing a horrific disservice to his fellow citizens in Louisiana and Mississippi,

after embarrassing our country in the eyes of the world, he is still on the payroll of FEMA.

But after hearing Michael Brown's hearing yesterday, the need for an independent commission is even more glaringly obvious. The American people are demanding it. And why are they demanding it? Because we have seen that the Department of Homeland Security is fundamentally flawed. It is not working, and we need to know why and we need to know what to do to fix it. Just the scale of the disaster alone, it is important to never repeat that again in our country. The amount of money alone justifies that we do an independent investigation. \$200 billion of our taxpayers' money is going down South, and we have no idea what it is being used for or how it is being spent. And the issue of cronyism needs to be explored. Eighty percent of the contracts for Katrina and Rita are nonbid contracts for no reason. Let us not be shamed as we were to the 9/11 Commission. Let us make this independent commission a reality now.

#### FINDING A WAY TO PAY FOR HURRICANE DAMAGE

(Mr. BISHOP of New York asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, Ben Bernanke said: "Every effort needs to be made to try and offset the cost of Katrina and Rita by reductions in other government programs." He suggested following through with eliminating or severely cutting 154 health care, education, and infrastructure priorities as proposed in the President's budget in order to meet his goal of cutting the deficit in half in 5 years.

What would these cuts entail? A \$4.3 billion cut from the Education Department's budget and \$2 billion from the Health and Human Services budget, just to name a few.

But what did Mr. Bernanke not suggest might help this President reach his deficit reduction goals? Any hint of rolling back tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans who earn over \$400,000 or scaling back the estate tax cut which has no impact on 98 percent of American families?

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that we find ways to pay for the hurricane damage, but we cannot afford to hold sacred the tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans at the expense of the values, priorities, or needs of middle-class Americans. They deserve better.

#### MOTION TO GO TO CONFERENCE ON H.R. 2360, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006

Mr. ROGERS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to clause 1 of rule XXII, and by direction of the Committee on Appropriations, I move to

take from the Speaker's table the bill (H.R. 2360) making appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes, with a Senate amendment thereto, disagree to the Senate amendment, and agree to the conference asked by the Senate.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHAW). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. ROGERS).

The motion was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MOTION TO INSTRUCT OFFERED BY MR. SABO

Mr. SABO. Mr. Speaker, I offer a motion to instruct conferees.

The Clerk read as follows:

MOTION TO INSTRUCT HOUSE CONFEREES H.R. 2360, FY2006 HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS BILL OFFERED BY MR. SABO

Mr. Sabo moves that the managers on the part of the House at the conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the bill, H.R. 2360, be instructed to insist on the headings and appropriation accounts in Title III of the House-passed bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under rule XXII, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. SABO) and the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. ROGERS) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. SABO).

Mr. SABO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, Hurricane Katrina shined a bright spotlight on troubling gaps in our Nation's homeland security. We all saw what it means to be unprepared: people die and suffer needlessly.

Americans are patiently waiting for competence and accountability from the Congress and the President. Our capacity to deal with catastrophe may actually have gotten worse since the Department of Homeland Security was created in 2003. The people demand that we fix what is broken.

Last week, Secretary Chertoff told me about his vision for improving national preparedness and response. What he said scares the living daylights out of me. In the Department's sixth reorganization plan in 2½ years, the Secretary proposes to sever the last ties between Federal disaster preparedness and response. He unveiled this proposal in July, before Katrina; and he is still determined to implement it on October 1.

With all due respect, the Secretary is dead wrong about what is most needed at the Federal level to coordinate and lead local, State, and Federal agencies in preparing for and responding to a major disaster, whether it is natural or man-made. If we have learned one thing in the past month, it should be that disaster preparedness and response must go hand in hand. Not long ago, FEMA did that well. The agency was robust, proactive and proved how good planning and coordination are critical to effective response. Congress should demand a pause before Secretary Chertoff implements more organizational changes that will further